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ABSTRACT

Considering developmental and prognostic implications of early peer relations, this review delineates some functions of children's relations with other children; summarizes current thinking about the interrelations between family socialization and peer socialization, especially in relation to the growth of social competence and the development of deviance; and discusses professional implications of the reviewed theories. Major sections of the paper address: (1) the nature of peer relations; (2) peer relations and risk; (3) developmental models; and (4) the role of caregivers and teachers in the development of early peer relations. A conjunctive model is advanced to account for the manner in which troubled family relations are followed by troubled peer relations, problems with self-regard, narrowed alternatives in choosing friends, and manifestations of social deviance. Social adjustment is seen as deriving from a combination or conjunction of family and peer influences. The origins of conjunctive cycles appear to exist in early childhood and require attention in program implementation and management for young children. Nearly 50 references are cited. (RH)

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Early Peer Relations: Developmental Significance and Prognostic Implications

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Abstract

The developmental and prognostic implications of early peer relations are considered. Evidence concerning peer difficulties as risk factors is reviewed along with research dealing with family relations and peer relations in social development. A conjunctive model is advanced to account for the manner in which troubled family relations are followed by troubled peer relations, problems with self-regard, narrowed alternatives in choosing friends, and manifestations of social deviance. The origins of these conjunctive cycles appear to exist in early childhood, hence requiring attention in program implementation and management for young children.

Early Peer Relations: Developmental Significance and Prognositic Implications

The family has been regarded as the pre-eminent socialization context because the child's earliest experiences occur within it and more time is consumed in family interaction than in interaction with other socializing agents. Family relationships are usually considered to be the well-springs of social competence and most theories of personality development attribute effectiveness and success in later functioning to the formation of smooth-running and secure relationships in family experience. Similarly, deviance and debilitation in adolescence and adulthood are thought to have their roots in insecure relationships and inadequate socialization within the family.

There is much evidence showing that, indeed, troubled children are likely to have troubled family relations. A substantial correlation exists between the number of symptoms presented by children and the cohesiveness and structure existing within the family (Rutter & Garmezy, 1983; Smets & Hartup, 1988). Without a doubt, chaotic and unstructured family relations give rise to childhood difficulties. But this model of social development is simplistic. Extensions and elaborations of childhood difficulties occur outside the family and involve experience with many other individuals. These experiences also contribute unique variance to the development of social competence, on the one hand, and the development of deviance or inadequate coping, on the other.

This review has three objectives: First, some of the functions of

children's relations with other children are delineated. Second, current thinking about the interrelations between family socialization and peer socialization is summarized, especially in relation to the growth of social competence and the development of deviance. Third, professional implications of these theories are discussed.

The Nature of Peer Relations

To most of us, children's relations with other children seem essentially to be luxuries in human development. Both parents and professionals tend to be disinterested in these relationships unless they result in bloody noses or chronic friendlessness. When we ask our children where they're going ("out") or what they're going to do ("nothing"), their replies usually don't bring more than a shrug. Only if real trouble ensues do we become concerned about children's experiences with other children. By and large, it is a world that adults don't think much about except for occasional worries about the trouble-making that everyone knows goes on there.

This is not a correct view of the peer culture. Considerable evidence suggests that peer relations contribute positively to mental health, both in childhood and later on (Hartup, 1983; Parker & Asher, 1987). The elements in child-child relations believed to be responsible for these contributions are the developmental equivalence of children and their companions, and the egalitarian nature of their interaction.

Adult-child versus child-child relations

Child-child relationships are 'horizontal' in contrast to adult-child relations, which are organized hierarchically. Recent research makes clear that the challenges confronted by a child when interacting

with another child differ substantially from the challenges presented when interacting with adults. Being older and wiser, adults can 'drive' their interactions with children and, indeed, observations show that these relationships are largely defined by issues of control and compliance. In contrast, issues of equity and reciprocity define the child's relations with other children, beginning in toddlerhood (Youniss, 1980). Peer interaction may sometimes be marked by dominance and submission, but children's relationships with one another are egalitarian to a much greater extent than their relationships with adults.

Most authorities regard egalitarian experience as essential for expanding the child's construction of reality to include cooperation and the understanding that social contracts are obligations which are mutually generated (Piaget, 1932). Being egalitarian does not mean that these relationships are always harmonious; the give-and-take in child-child relations actually involves more aggression and disagreement than occurs in interaction with adults. Moreover, conflict occurs more frequently between children and their friends than between classmates who are not friends (see below). Most theorists have argued, however, that the conflicts experienced in interactions with other children present unique challenges <u>because</u> the antagonists are equals, and that their resolution leaves a special developmental residue for precisely the same reason. The argument goes something like this: Children's interactions with adults lead to the acquisition of much information about the world and the ways it operates, especially about what can be called "matters of fact." Knowledge induced by confrontations with adults, though, largely involves changes in the child's thinking brought about by conformity

or compliance with the adult's views. Only interactions with agemates offer children a chance to negotiate, thereby producing knowledge by means of consensus rather than by means of compliance.

Parent-child and child-child relations are functionally dissimilar beginning in the child's earliest experience. Parent-child relations consist initially of care-giving and succorance, and this continues throughout the first decade even though the nature of caregiving changes. Child-child interaction consists mainly of play and socializing, including both aggressive and non-aggressive exchanges (Barker & Wright, 1955: Whiting & Whiting, 1975). The major developmental task of the first two years seems to be the construction of focussed relationships with adults, not the construction of relationships with other children. One of the most striking changes to occur toward the end of the second year of life is the emergence of contingencies in child-child interaction that involve sustained attention, imitation, role relations ('chaser'and 'chased'), and cooperation (Eckerman, Davis, & Didow, 1989). This developmental timetable is universal. These developments do <u>not</u> mean every toddler needs early educational experience, but they explain why few societies formally provide peer experience for children until the end of the second year -- with the exception of sibling caretaking.

<u>Friendships</u>

The word 'friend' appears in children's vocabularies quite early, usually by the fourth year, although most young children cannot articulate the mutuality and commitment that are the hallmarks of these relationships as we know them. Observational studies demonstrate that friendships provide children with social experiences

that are unique, and that may well have important developmental implications. Close relationships with adults do not provide children with the mutuality, affective sharing, and experience in conflict resolution that friendships do.

Recent work, for example, shows that friendship relations have a special role in conflict management (Hartup, Laursen, Stewart, & Eastenson, 1988). We observed four-year olds for a period of 10 weeks, identifying those who were friends by means of both sociometric interviews and observations. At the same time, we accumulated observations of disagreements occuring among the children, separating those that occurred between mutual friends, unilateral associates (i.e., unreciprocated attractions), and nonfriends. Examining the frequencies with which these disagreements occurred, we discovered that rates of disagreements between nonfriends were slightly greater than between friends but, since children spend more time with their friends than with nonfriends, most actually experienced more conflicts with friends than with other children. More important, there were significant differences in the nature of conflict resolutions occurring between friends and between nonfriends. Although friends and nonfriends did not disagree about different issues, friends' conflicts were more likely to involve mutual disengagement than the conflicts of nonfriends, were less heated, were more likely to end in compromise, and were more likely to be followed by continued interaction. Conflicts involving "one-way" friends (i.e., unreciprocated sociometric choices) resembled the conflicts of nonfriends more closely than the conflicts of mutual friends, although interaction between them was more likely to continue after the conflict had been resolved than was the case with nonfriends.

Together with other evidence that shows children's interactions with their friends to be different from their interactions with nonfriends in terms of emotional expression, attention to equity considerations, mutuality, and sharing (e.g., Newcomb & Brady, 1982), it is clear that these relationships are not only prized by children, but provide them with socialization experiences that no other relationships can. Within them, the child has an opportunity to cope with both prosocial demands (i.e., demands for cooperation and intimacy) as well as conflict and competition. Moreover, these challenges must be dealt with in ways that will permit the child's relationships to continue.

These arguments suggest that the child without friends is a child at risk in social and emotional development. Longitudinal evidence on this matter is not as extensive as longitudinal evidence on the importance of social acceptance generally (to which we turn our attention momentarily). But the literature shows again and again that children with friends are more socially competent than children without friends, and that troubled children commonly have difficulties in forming and maintaining these relationships (Hartup & Sancilio, 1986; Rutter & Garmezy, 1983). It is difficult to sort out whether the child's capacity for successfully forming and maintaining friendships is (a) a nonessential 'by-product' of more fundamental competencies that predict future adjustment directly, or (b) crucial because friendships provide unique and necessary opportunities for the development of certain relevant abilities. Still a third possibility is that friendship experience may not be strictly necessary for healthy adaptation but merely an expedient means to that end.

Peer Relations and Risk

Striking individual differences are evident in the extent to which young children are accepted or rejected by their peers. Some children are well-regarded by nearly everybody; others are nearly universally disliked. Studies suggesting a link between problematic childhood peer relations and adult maladjustment have accumulated slowly, but the evidence now is compelling. As demonstrated in both retrospective and prospective investigations, psychologically troubled individuals have histories of poor peer relations extending back to early and middle childhood (Parker & Asher, 1987). Depending on the type of follow-back analysis, there is nearly universal demonstration that maladjusted adults are more likely to have had peer difficulties in childhood than their better-adjusted contemporaries. These life histories show the relevant difficulties to involve being disliked (rejection), being aggressive, and being shy/withdrawn. Between 30% and 70% of disordered adults in these studies showed a history of problematic peer relations as compared to 10% to 15% among control cases. Follow-back studies, of course, only indicate the extent to which difficulties with peer relations characterize the histories of older maladjusted individuals. They do not demonstrate the extent to which poor peer relations are predictive of these difficulties. At the moment, though, the literature contains more than 30 prospective studies that also demonstrate a link between peer relations in childhood and problems in later life (see Parker & Asher, 1987). Thus, the evidence strongly suggests that poor peer relations are important factors in the histories of children who are 'at risk' for later difficulties.

This 'risk hypothesis,' however, must be qualified in several

respects: First, these studies indicate that predictability varies as a function of the type of peer measure obtained. Social rejection (as determined by sociometric tests or interviews) and aggressiveness are the most consistent predictors of negative outcome. Little evidence connects 'not being liked' consistently with these outcomes and, especially, shyness/withdrawal in early and middle childhood has not been demonstrated consistently to place the child at risk (Parker & Asher, 1987). It may be that shyness neither disrupts peer interaction nor peer reputations as extensively as aggressiveness or that it is unstable developmentally. But shyness and withdrawal are also difficult to measure effectively in large scale studies, and longitudinal investigations to date have not included very intensive or systematic assessment of social isolation and withdrawal. One recent longitudinal investigation, however, assists in clarifying this situation (Rubin, Hymel, Rowden, & LeMare, 1989; Rubin, Hymel, Mills, & Rose-Krasnor, in press). The results suggest that shyness is largely independent of sociometric status in early and middle childhood (even though shy children are recognized as such by both their teachers and other children) but becomes correlated with peer rejection by the time that children reach 10 and 11 years of age. Since, by this time, social withdrawal is also correlated with loneliness and depression, it appears to be a constellation of shyness and negative self-perceptions that <u>gradually</u> generates negative evaluations of the shy child by other children.

Second, being aggressive and impulsive are closely related to subsequent deviance and are also closely related to being disliked. Being disliked in middle childhood, however, is itself significantly

correlated with later criminality in some studies (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, in press) but not in others (West & Farrington, 1973; Olweus, 1989). More will be said about this later, but the reader should note that there is a possibility that the link between social rejection and social deviance may be indirect rather than direct.

Third, peer relations assessments of all types show similar errors of prediction, namely, there are few false negative errors but many false positive ones. That is, peer relations problems are seldom absent among children who ultimately exhibit problematic outcomes but, at the same time, indications of early peer difficulties over-select many children who are not actually at risk for later maladjustment. Research workers are now seeking to improve the long-term predictions that can be made on the basis of peer difficulties. For example, French (1988) has demonstrated that two distinct sub-types can be identified among disliked elementary school children. Psychological dynamics are relatively clear with one sub-type that accounts for about 50% of the cases: these are children (mostly boys) who are aggressive, impulsive, and disruptive. Other children who are disliked by their peers do not show a clear profile, although they seem to be shy as well as under-controlled, i.e., they exhibit low ego-control. These children may not account for every false positive prediction from early peer difficulties to later maladjustment, but separating them from aggressive/rejected children should reduce the number of these 'misses' (Kuperschmidt, 1983). Better understanding of the varieties of peer rejection is urgently needed since it has obvious implications for the selection of children who should receive early intervention.

Fourth, the risk premise has received stronger support in

relation to outcomes such as school drop-out and criminality than in relation to later psychopathology. One can't be entirely certain about why this is so. One can argue reasonably that the literature dealing with peer relations and psychopathology is not very sophisticated methodologically, thus obscuring these dynamics (Hartup, 1983; Parker & Asher, 1987). But it is also quite possible that peer difficulties are simply more predictive of school drop-out and criminality than of other kinds of mental health outcomes. As mentioned earlier, the developmental antecedents of internalizing disorders have been generally hard to trace and may not be apparent until late childhood (Rubin, et al., in press), while the developmental course of externalizing difficulties has been somewhat easier and extends from the early childhood years (Farrington, 1986). One can hardly be surprised, then, that the documentation of the poor peer relations --> maladjustment linkage should be more clear-cut in the case of conduct disorder.

Developmental Models

Several different developmental scenarios have been constructed to account for individual outcomes. Two such models will be outlined in this section: a) a direct socialization model; and b) a conjunctive (combined) socialization model.

The "direct" model

The development of social deviance has been thought to arise more-or-less directly from coercive exchanges in family interaction that begin in early childhood. Although the aggressive, impulsive child may also experience rejection in his or her early interactions with peers, this rejection is thought essentially to be a by-product

of an underlying aggressive pathology arising elsewhere. Criminal or delinquent activity is not a very large part of the picture in the early years. Although some children engage in criminal behavior between 5 and 8 years of age, most are delinquents-to-be rather than active criminals. Speaking developmentally, this early period of aggressiveness and impulsivity appears as a stepping-stone to conduct disorder (Farrington, 1986).

Various studies support the notion that aggressiveness and impulsiveness arise in early socialization within the family. "Insecure attachments" between mother and infant, for example, foreshadow difficulties with impulse controls and negative peer interactions in the period between four and six (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986).

Other studies show that young children who are 'at risk' for social deviance are taught anti-social behaviors in the home. Patterson and his associates (Patterson, 1982; Patterson & Bank, 1989) have described this training in many different studies. Extending from toddlerhood, this training involves unusually high frequencies of coercive transactions between parent and child. Both parent and child are shown to be inept in controlling the behavior of one another, as revealed by the high frequencies with which one is likely to start an aversive exchange, respond negatively when the other person has just behaved negatively, and continue acting negatively once an exchange has started. Families at risk for aggressive pathology use negative reinforcement that actually accelerates and sustains these coercive cycles so that the child's home constitutes an aggressive training ground, whatever else it comprises. Moreover, the results indicate that these modes of interaction characterize both parent-child and

sibling interaction to a greater extent in families with 'problem children' than in non-problem families (Patterson, 1982). Problem families are also characterized by poor parent monitoring, parent-child relationships that are essentially rejecting, and deficient prosocial socialization. Thus, the problem child is not taught how to relate positively to either adults or to peers, how to work, or to accept responsibility for both giving and receiving.

The origins of these processes are obscure. The relevant studies suggest that, while parent-child interaction is clearly involved, it may not be entirely responsible. First, the relationships and interactions that are associated with risk for anti-social behavior do not extend across all children in a family. Second, the histories of many children at risk show that they were 'difficult to socialize' from very early in childhood (Patterson, 1982). Thus, some toddlers are more difficult to handle than their siblings, probably owing to early temperamental dispositions. The developmental course is clearly an interactive one between these early dispositions (which account for only a small amount of variance) and the coercive socialization cycles mentioned. But the important issue is that some children seem to be difficult to socialize from the very beginning and it is difficult to attribute these differences entirely to early experience.

Whatever the origins, though, family interaction becomes closely linked to aggression and anti-social behavior in early childhood and, according to the "direct effects" model, continues to supply fuel for social deviance in middle childhood and adolescence.

A conjunctive model

More complex models of social development suggest that family and

peer socialization combine in determining the child's adaptation. While family experience may dispose the child directly to anti-social behavior (as described above), these experiences may also determine subsequent outcomes indirectly by predisposing the child to certain kinds of peer experiences. According to these notions, family relations influence both the quantity and quality of the child's early experiences with peers, largely accounting for whether these experiences will be successes or failures. These peer experiences then contribute, on their own, to adolescent and adult outcomes. Social adjustment is thus seen as deriving from a combination or conjunction of family and peer influences.

In order to describe this conjunctive view of the child's socialization, we need to expand our discussion in several ways: First, we need to describe the synergy involving family and peer socialization that is established early in the lives of most children. Second, we need to consider the implications of social rejection in greater detail.

Family and peer synergies. Recent studies suggest that a close connection between the social worlds of family relations and peer relations is established in early childhood. First, family relations function as springboards or "secure bases" that support children in engaging the environment on their own (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Exploration brings about contact with other children, among other objects, and interaction with them. Toddlers evidence considerable intrinsic interest in other toddlers when their mothers are nearby, and spend much time orienting toward them and interacting with them (Eckerman, Whatley, & Kutz, 1975). Thus, "secure base behavior" (exploration supported by the relationship between the

mother and child) is one mechanism that enlarges the child's world to include other children.

Second, mothers "manage" the lives of their children, deliberately providing opportunities or making choices that determine what the child will do and with whom (Hartup, 1979; Rubin & Slomin, 1984). Many mothers arrange contacts between their young children and other youngsters, believing this to be desirable (fathers initiate these contacts less often than mothers). These management decisions also enlarge the child's social world and serve as "bridges" between family and peer relations. The mothers of securely attached children are known to arrange these contacts more frequently than mothers of insecurely attached youngsters (Lieberman, 1977), thus indicating a more-or-less direct connection between the quality of the mother-child relationship and the mother's management of the child's social activities. New studies also show that these "arrangements" have a bearing on the child's social experience. In one investigation (Ladd & Golter, 1988), preschool children whose parents frequently arranged peer contacts were observed to have more playmates and more frequent play companions outside of school than children whose parents infrequently arranged such contacts. Moreover, boys whose parents initiated these contacts were better liked and less often rejected than boys whose parents didn't initiate them; girls, for some reason, did not differ according to the extent that their parents arranged these contacts. Thus, the evidence clearly shows that management decisions serve to connect family and peer relations in the lives of most children.

Third, early relationships between parents and children

contribute to the child's success with other children through maximizing self-esteem and the provision of social skills. Some of these contributions derive from direct tuition, i.e., deliberate teaching initiated by the child's parents. Parke and Bhavnagri (1989), for example, observed mothers and fathers separately under two conditions: a) when asked to supervise the children and a playmate and "to help the children play together," and b) when asked not to assist or interfere with them. The supervisory instructions elicited both direct and indirect teaching by the parents and, among the children, more frequent turn-taking, longer play bouts, and more frequent cooperation. Significant correlations were also obtained between the children's behavior toward each other and the behavior of their mothers, including the mother's ability to initiate and sustain interaction, her responsiveness, the synchronicity of her interactions, and her affective expressions.

Children also acquire skills by interacting with their mothers and fathers (through modeling and coaching); these skills generalize to interaction with other children. Physical play between young children and their parents, for example, enhances the child's ability both to encode and decode emotional signals and these abilities, in turn, are correlated with the child's sociometric status (Parke, MacDonald, Burks, Carson, Bhavnagri, Barth, & Beitel, 1989). Other mother-child interactions are also related to the young child's behavior with other children. The extent to which the mother uses aversive controls in interacting with the child, for example, is positively correlated with the child's aversiveness toward other children and negatively correlated with his or her sociometric status (Putallaz, 1987). Altogether, then, the evidence suggests that parent

and peer relationships are synergistic, beginning in earliest childhood.

The origins and nature of peer rejection. The synergies existing between parent and peer relations suggest that children with histories of insecure attachments and coercive family socialization will encounter more difficulties in early contacts with other children than children with better functioning relationships. The research evidence confirms this: children with good family relationships in infancy and early childhood often turn out to be more popular in nursery school than children with insecure relationships, tend to engage more frequently in social contact, and to be more effective in offering guidance and suggestions to others. Poor family relationships are also accompanied by dependence on the teacher and poor impulse controls (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986).

Not surprisingly, school-aged children who are disagreeable, impulsive, aggressive, and disruptive typically are disliked and avoided by other children (Dodge, 1983; Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983). These children are different from other children in other ways as well: they are deficient in social problem solving (Dodge, MClaskey, & Feldman, 1985), social knowledge (Asher & Renshaw, 1981), and response evaluation (Crick & Ladd, 1987). Further, extremely high or low self-esteem also is characteristic of unpopular children (Boivin & Begin, 1988). Rejected, aggressive children construct attribution biases leading them to attribute hostility to their associates when hostility isn't there (Dodge, 1980), and which contribute to the negative social reputations these children have among their associates. Making matters worse, the negative impressions created by the impulsive,

aggressive child are maintained and perpetuated in the minds of the other children, an occurrence believed to exacerbate the rejected child's aversive behavior (Price & Dodge, 1989). In other words, interpersonal relations are established in which acting-out behavior generates rejection, negative peer expectations are generally confirmed as well as extended, and acting-out behavior escalated.

At the same time, there is relatively little opportunity for these children to engage in constructive interactions with other children that would enhance cooperative problem-solving, sharing, effective conflict management, communication, and a sense of intimacy. Social skills, then, become deviant among these children because they have been cut off from the necessary learning opportunities as well as because they have acquired repertoires of deviant behaviors.

To make matters worse, each succeeding failure limits the other children with whom the anti-social child can interact. Progressively, the companions available to the aggresssive/rejected child include a disproportionate number of unkilled, unpopular children. That is, children select associates who provide rough matches for both their own social skills. This 'shopping for social opportunities' (Patterson & Bank, 1989) is presumably transactional -- i.e., the child selects associates who are similar to him or herself, and similar associates select the child so that, over time, peer groups become relatively homogeneous in terms of activities, values, and interests. And, indeed, studies of children's social networks among school-aged children show that aggressive children hang out with other aggressive children (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Gariepy, 1988; Ladd, 1983). Via these processes, the associates of the anti-social child slip further and further to the extremes in terms of both their

social incompetence and their anti-social proclivities. These limitations, in turn, increase the likelihood that the child will remain fixed in the anti-social process, becoming at greater and greater risk for antisocial behavior.

The shopping hypothesis implies that it is rejection by normal peers that leads troublesome children to shop outside the ordinary range of child associates for support and stimulation, leading eventually to their discovery (or selection) by a group of deviant peers. Usually occurring during preadolescence, the situation becomes one in which rejected/aggressive children develop affiliations with other children who share their own anti-social, anti-school, and anti-authority attitudes. According to this developmental scenario, the road to deviance does not begin with associates who are themselves deviant; it is only the final stage on a road which begins with social failure and being disliked in early and middle childhood.

Family relations and peer relations would appear to function conjunctively in normal development as well as in the development of deviance. No one has been able to include all the necessary events in a single, comprehensive investigation that would serve to test the conjunctive model, but it fits the existing data surprisingly well. Simpler, direct developmental models or models suggesting that the quality of peer relations is merely a 'by-product' of more fundamental maladaptations in the child's development are less and less appealing. At the same time, multivariate studies are carrying us closer and closer to comprehensive verification of some kind of conjunctive model of social development (cf., Dishion, in press). Thus, it is this way of thinking that probably should inform the work of

practitioners in the field of early development and education.

The Role of Caregivers and Teachers in the Development of Early Peer Relations

The peer relations literature thus demonstrates that early social development has implications for the child's later competence. Many of the school-age children and adults in our society who have serious adjustment problems showed early signs of trouble. Knowing this, it behooves parents, caregivers, and teachers to do all within their power to enable children to make successful adaptations to the peer group. Adults in early childhood programs can help by acknowledging the value of peer relations during the preschool years, and by providing ample high-quality time for children to play and interact informally with companions.

It is encouraging to know that even young children are effective in socializing one another. Ordinarily, the most socially skilled children in a group are watched, imitated, and chosen as playmates more often than are the less skilled ones (Vaughn & Waters, 1981), suggesting that children take their cues from the most competent role models available. Although young children are discriminating in their choice of friends, they also are forgiving; unskilled preschoolers are not yet burdened with negative reputations that compound the problems of unskilled older children. Indeed, the early childhood peer group appears to be a good place to begin the task of adapting to egalitarian peer relations.

Adults also play a significant role in the socialization of young children by providing wise and prudent guidance as children make the necessary adjustments to life with peers. Children expect adults in positions of authority to instruct them as to behaviors that are

acceptable and unacceptable, to monitor their behavior, and protect them from harm (Youniss, 1980). Early childhood caregivers and teachers function to a considerable extent as surrogate parents, providing a secure base of support from which the child explores the out-of-home social and material environment. Given the extensive overlap in the roles of parent, teacher, and caregiver during early childhood, it is not surprising that the child-rearing literature offers relevant and useful insights for early childhood personnel.

The implications of child-rearing styles for teachers and caregivers. The research by Patterson and his colleagues reviewed in this paper indicates clearly that hostile, rejecting parent-child relations place a child at risk for anti-social behavior during later childhood and beyond. Although some children exposed to highly punitive child-rearing regimes escape this fate, an extensive body of research confirms that a missing element in the lives of troubled children is the presence of an attentive, nurturant caregiver.

Yet the literature also indicates that "love is not enough" in child-rearing. A style of parenting called authoritative by Baumrind (1973; 1977) incorporates a pattern of child-rearing strategies that is particularly effective in fostering social development. The authoritative parent is nurturant and affectionate toward the child, sensitive to the child's needs, respectful of the child's rights and points of view, and generous in the use of positive reinforcement in shaping the child's social behavior. Authoritative parents also place some demands on their children. They exert moderate to high levels of control over the child's comings and goings, set standards for the child's behavior, and expect reasonable compliance with parental

requests.

The authoritative style of parenting appears to be effective in facilitating positive social attitudes toward the self and others. Authoritatively reared children enjoy high self-esteem and self-confidence. They are "agentic" rather than passive or helpless. They show consideration and regard for others, are biased toward prosocial instead of anti-social behavior, and expect to assume responsibility for their behavior. They are liked by adults and enjoy favored status in the peer group (Baumrind, 1977; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986).

Authoritative adult-child interaction has intuitive appeal because it avoids the excesses of both laissez-faire permissiveness and coercive punitiveness. Indeed, the strategies used by authoritative parents are similar to those that characterize the ideal teacher in the minds of many early childhood educators. Research on two significant aspects of this style of interaction -- adult-child nurturance and the use of positive social reinforcement -- offer insights as to how and why this style of parenting leads to positive social outcomes.

The role of nurturance in adult-child relations. Although nurturance in adult-child interactions does not have a direct impact on peer relations, it does have implications for the child's behavior with peers. Compelling evidence from the attachment literature indicates that nurturance plays a critical role in establishing secure attachments to primary caregivers in infancy (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Secure attachment during the first year of life, in turn, predicts competence in peer relations during early childhood, as documented earlier in this review.

Nurturance in child-rearing appears to have the additional

advantage of buffering the adult-child relationship against the need to use harsh punishment to control behavior. Children cared for by nurturant adults seem more willing to be mentored by their caregivers than do children in the care of punitive adults (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Those who enjoy nurturant relationships apparently seek to maintain them by avoiding excesses that threaten the status quo; they have much to lose in the loss of support from a nurturant caregiver.

Finally, nurturance in adult-child relations facilitates the child's acquisition of a nurturant disposition. Children imitate the behavior of others with whom they interact -- especially competent others. Those who are being reared, cared for, or taught by nurturant models learn directly from that association how to take the role of the nurturer as well as the nurtured (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983).

For the most part, however, the imitation of significant adults in the child's life involves the more subtle process of identification rather than instrumental imitation. Children who form an identification with significant others not only imitate specific behaviors of that person, but also take pleasure and satisfaction in "being like" the model with whom they identify. They admire and respect the model, wish to spend time with that person, and strive to think and act as they believe the model would think and act. Children are especially likely to identify with adults who have social power vis-à-vis the child (such as a parent, caregiver, or teacher) and with whom they have an affectionate, positive relationship. One would not expect a child to be likely to emulate or wish to spend time with a hostile, rejecting model. But identification with nurturant adults

may be of special importance in the acquisition of prosocial behaviors -- those behaviors necessary when the child is called upon to consider the needs of others above his or her own (Waters, Hay, & Richters, 1986). Children need special incentives to perform these behaviors, and wanting to emulate a thoughtful, considerate, caring adult could provide the necessary motivation.

The use of positive social reinforcement in fostering mature peer relations. The effectiveness of positive social reinforcement from adults in shaping the social repertoire of children is one of the most extensively documented phenomena in the socialization literature. Contingent reinforcers such as smiles, hugs, compliments, and other indicators of adult approval have been observed to increase friendly peer interaction, verbal exchanges as alternatives to physical aggression, generosity, and cooperativeness. Further, social reinforcement for these acceptable behaviors often is followed by a decrease in the incidence of their less acceptable counterparts (unfriendliness, physical aggression, selfishness, and uncooperativeness) even in the absence of disapproval or punishment for these behaviors. Reinforcers that strengthen selected behaviors in the child's repertoire seem to weaken or "squeeze out" alternative responses that are not being reinforced at the same rate.

Some words of caution are in order regarding the overuse or misuse of social reinforcement. Adult approval should not be used frivolously or so habitually that it becomes meaningless as an indicator of noteworthy behavior. Behavior analysts describe a procedure called "successive approximations" in which children are generously reinforced early in the development of a skill for minimal performance, but as skill develops, reinforcement is forthcoming only

for behaviors that are at the cutting edge of the child's ability. Under these circumstances, positive reinforcment remains meaningful to the child and continues to have significant informational value; over-use reduces the value of these same reinforcers (Lepper & Greene, 1978).

Finally, the work of Patterson and his colleagues calls attention to the danger of inadvertently reinforcing coercive behavior in interactions with children. Ineffectual teacher/caregiver withdrawal from the scene when children become intimidating to their peers or non-compliant with adults allows these behaviors to "pay off" for the child. Under these circumstances, one would not expect noxious behaviors to be replaced by more acceptable alternatives until the adults adopt a more effective plan for coping with the misbehavior. In spite of these warnings, it is likely that no strategy used by adults will carry more of the burden for establishing desirable behaviors in the child's repertoire than the generous (albeit judicious) use of positive social reinforcement.

Conclusion

Good peer relations are developmental forerunners of good adaptations in later life. The evidence suggests that child-child relations serve as contexts for the acquisition of social skills, as cognitive and emotional resources, and as models to be used in forming other relationships. Peer relations, however, would appear to combine developmentally with family relations in determining whether or not the child is 'at risk' in socioemotional development. Troubled family relations are likely to be followed by troubled peer relations, problems with self-regard, and narrowed alternatives in choosing

friends. Current studies suggest that, unfortunately, this cycling may begin in early childhood. Awareness of these developmental dynamics is necessary in designing and implementing early childhood programs.

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